

State Technical Committee Meeting

12/13/2016

9:30am – 11:30pm

The Nature Conservancy
22 Bridge Street, 4th Floor
Concord, NH 03301

Meeting Called By: **Rick Ellsmore, NH NRCS**

Type of meeting: **State Technical Committee**

Facilitator: **Rick Ellsmore, NH NRCS**

Note taker: **Shari Cohen, NRCS**

Attendees:

Sarah Holmes, John Hodsdon, Pam Gilbert, Andrew Madison, George Hamilton, Bruce Cilley, Kira Jacobs, Karl Honkonen, Beverly Mason, Jasen Stock, Wendy Weisiger, Jim Oehler, Tom Thomson

Meeting Minutes

Agenda Item: **Welcome, Introductions, and Partner Updates**

Rick Ellsmore, State Conservationist opened the meeting

Partner Introductions with Some Updates

Rick Ellsmore, NRCS:

Updated re: his detail time at NRCS Headquarters. USDA political appointees resigning by 1/20th. FA Programs are ready to roll out. Working under a Continuing Resolution through 4/28th.

Tom Thomson, Representing Tree Farmers:

On current use advisory board, they are meeting today around current use rates. Forestry categories will go up slightly w/ Ag land remaining the same; board will address the legislative rules committee. Current use booklet for Forestry Land owners will be available 4/1st. Harvesting timber for low grade wood market is terrible; 65% is low grade and difficult to get rid of.

Wendy Weisiger, SPNHF:

Working with NRCS on a 5 year CSP contract and will reapply for 5 more years. We also have 2 Agricultural Land Easements and are applying for a 45-acre easement in Nashua. Focusing on the seacoast area to protect now because it's being developed the quickest. Low grade (wood) markets are bad right now; it's frustrating because that market won't be coming back which means a huge change. Keeping biomass plants going so that low grade wood remains important is one solution.

Jim Oehler, NH F & G:

There's been a revision to the State threatened & endangered lists – American Marten and Eagle are de-listed, eastern box turtle is being added. We've been able to track these turtles in Amherst. The little brown and Northern long-eared bats are being added to the endangered list. A moose project is in its 4th year looking at population decline; GPS collars have been on them since last January - ME & VT are joining us. Calf mortality was at 80% last year due to winter tick.

George Hamilton: The range of ticks is expanding at a faster rate than in the past.

Pam Gilbert, Grafton County Conservation District, Manager:

Had a busy summer and fall w/ a soil health equipment rental and workshops in conjunction w/ Cooperative Extension. We're involved w/ more demo projects now, and our annual plant sale.

Jasen Stock, NH Timber Owners Association:

Mills are closing in ME and northern New England has lost a huge amount of capacity; this is hard felt. Landowners w/ a high % of low grade wood are in a difficult predicament because loggers won't work w/ them. This could remain difficult for several years. State legislature is working to sure-up the biomass plants and legislation for energy and power plants. We have 60 other bills that we're monitoring in the state house. There are no bills to scrap current use; that's the good news. We anticipate a rule change for current use w/ technical changes to the current use process. A wetlands rule is taking comments and we should see some drafts soon.

Andrew Madison, Granite State Rural Water Association:

We are working in Swanzey right now (Cheshire county) to protect ground water resources and in Somersworth to control recreational land use along the Salmon Falls river. Our program year begins 4/1st; we're funded by USDA and protecting privately owned forest land for drinking water purposes.

George Hamilton, UNH Cooperative Extension, Food & Agriculture:

We have open positions in Safety, Ag business, Horticulture and Animal Science - Forestry has 2 positions to fill as well. Working w/ drought team to follow through; we would like to expand ponds as farmers prefer surface water vs. wells.

John Hodsdon, Belknap County Conservation District, Supervisor:

We had a meeting last night which reversed the cuts that were made last year; we're back to where we were 2 years ago.

Sarah Holmes, Senator Shaheen's Office:

We passed the Continuing Resolution in the 11th hour. We also approved a provision for USDA to have more authority for loan programs.

Karl Honkonen, USFS:

Grants are finishing up. The Stewardship Network is a collaborative getting folks involved in outdoor activities. The Joint Chief's project is wrapped up (very successful). We are working on emergency erosion control techniques w/ test sites, a riparian buffer project in the Merrimack river watershed w/ NH & VT on 3 or 4 sites in suburban areas to restore. Regarding low grade markets for wood; if NAFTA is tweaked or changed, it could affect the Canadian markets as well.

Kira Jacobs, EPA, Boston:

We are bracing for changes; it will be a while before we have a regional administrator, usually up to 9 mos. after inauguration. Long Island Sound (LIS)/CT River RCPP is going full throttle w/ 3 components; soil health, resiliency (TNC is lead on that), and a land protection subcommittee who will issue grants to successful applicant (reviewing 12 proposals now). We are protecting habitat in NE; at a Saco river meeting w/ Nels Liljedahl representing NH NRCS, to replicate the work we did in the Salmon Falls River watershed. The annual Salmon Falls meeting in Somersworth is coming up.

NRCS Update – Rick Ellsmore (Presentation on website)

Rick: The NRCS backlog is now over 200 applications; we can fund higher priority projects. Drought assistance is being supported w/ \$500,000 from our general EQIP funds. We have a new turtle initiative to get funding for the 3 listed turtles including restoration and land protection. RCPP has a national and state component; our national projects are LIS and Wildlife Management Institute which is a young forest initiative w/ 7 states NE + NY, 5.4 mil.

A RCPP w/ Monadnock Conservancy to do easement work is in the queue now and the Tin Mountain RCPP is almost ready to finish up. We will share those results.

Drought: Water wells under EQIP/Irrigation are now allowed. We are working on permitting for ponds by gathering criteria. No-till practices help a lot w/ water retention.

NWQI (EQIP sub account) area is in Grafton County w/ 6 small watersheds so that we don't need to keep changing them. We will be able to do significant work w/ farms along these waterways. Drinking water quality is a priority.

Discussion: Riparian buffer as an effective way to sure up erosion and restore aquatic species.

Discussion: Invasives

Rick: Invasives in the southern part of the state are relegated to select projects.

Wendy, SPNHF: struggling to find a place where removing the Invasives is a winning situation - we need to look at the money spent vs. the result and ability to control it over time.

Jasen, NH TOA: NRCS should be more proactive in dealing w/ Invasives.

Rick: NRCS is evaluating each site to be sure that we can be successful.

Jasen: Steve Eisenhower, CE, has a practice that has been successful by outcompeting w/ native species.

Rick: We can do some trials.

Karl: In Hebron, ME there is a state owned parcel w/ test sites for treatment of invasives.

Kira: Large municipal water suppliers have been asking EPA for advice re: invasives because they cannot treat w/ herbicides - state pesticides agencies meets w/ EPA to discuss this problem

George: Discussed the rules and setbacks for applying pesticides and herbicides.

Break

FSA Update: Bruce Cilley (Handouts on website)

- The US Drought monitor comes out every Thursday and the most recent still shows all of NH in drought w/ 60% in severe drought. Once the ground freezes, the water cannot get through - we went into last winter w/ the same situation. The amount of snow we get will have an impact.
- We had a lot of signups for ECP, especially in the extreme drought area counties (6 of them) - FSA programs do not cover domestic water. We don't have enough funding for all of the ECP applications we've received.
- CRP - grasslands has been used primarily outside of NE, but we now have small livestock operations w/ acreage for grazing and seeing some interest.
- FSA political appointees have already sent in our letters of resignation effective 12 noon 1/20/2017.
- Linda Grames has been w/ FSA for 39 years and is retiring on 12/31/2016. Marilyn Milne has been hired to replace Linda and will be the new Administrative Officer. Marilyn's position is advertised on USAJobs right now and through Wednesday.
- We want to fill that position as quickly as we can pending the potential hiring freeze. Our goal is to fill as many positions now as possible.
- I have submitted an application to remain.

Rick: Thank you for everything you've done.

Rural Development Update: Beverly Mason

- Follow up of RD's involvement in the State Drought Team.
- RD one of the few funders available for very low income homeowners in Rural Areas needing water system repair/replacement. Eligible applicants have household incomes below 50% median household income.
- 24 Loans and Grants made in FY 2016
- Many more calls from customers we could not help – few referral options for them

- Appears the State Drought Team may reconvene to discuss additional funding options.
- FY 2016 finished with RD bringing over \$216 million to New Hampshire. This was from loans and grants given from our Community Programs, Housing Programs and Business Programs.

FY 2017:

- We are operating under a continuing resolution taking us through April. We are receiving loan and grant funds based on last year allocations.
- State Director, Ted Brady will be leaving his post on January 6th. Jon-Michael Muise will be Acting State Director until a new Director is appointed.
- Lots of funding announcements are out and posted on our website. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/nh> Application deadlines are also posted.

Sarah: The Governor's office has been doing outreach for RD programs

Pam Gilbert, NHACD Update (Linda Brownson Presentation on website)

Tom Thomson: NH F & G question re: bats

Jim Oehler: response; NLEB is on the state endangered list - all 3 bats have the same rules for forestry activity

Rick: NRCS is retaining the June/July no cut policy.

Jim: Jasen Stock also has no concerns regarding the June/July no cut rule.

Karl: Reminded folks that June/July is pup rearing season for the bats.

Rick: We should have an acting Chief in place the next time we convene - I'll be in Denver for the NACD meeting at the end of January and should have more information for you at our next meeting.

Next State Technical Committee Meeting in March 2017 TBA

Hearing no further questions - adjourn 11:40

